

Laurenti revisited

Günter GOLLMANN

Universität Wien, Department für Evolutionsbiologie,
Althanstr. 14, 1090 Wien, Austria
<guenter.gollmann@univie.ac.at>

Josephus Nicolaus LAURENTI, 1768 - *Specimen medicum, exhibens synopsis Reptilium emendatam cum experimentis circa venena et antidota Reptilium Austracorum. Facsimile reprint with an English translation by Sergius L. Kuzmin* Laurenti Verlag, Supplement der *Zeitschrift für Feldherpetologie*, 7, 2005: 1-247. ISBN 3-933066-24-7

Reprinting old volumes in zoology has gained some popularity in recent times. In many cases, beautiful illustrations provided the main attraction of such an enterprise. So why should anybody be interested in what ADLER (1989) called an "unimposing little book" with just five black-and-white plates of illustrations?

Laurenti's treatise contains two parts, a systematic overview of the "Reptilia" (including amphibians) and a natural history of Austrian "reptiles", with some detailed descriptions and remarkable observations on natural history, including eighty-nine carefully detailed experiments on the venoms of a number of species. Viewed from a local patriotic viewpoint, this book opens the chronicle of herpetological research in Austria (which was a large empire at that time) (FIEDLMANN, 2001). Its main interest for a wider audience is based on the many genus and species names first proposed here, making it an important resource for taxonomy and nomenclature even today. Much of its scientific content, especially the toxicological work, is clearly outdated and will be read mainly for curiosity or historical interest. Nevertheless, I found both in the descriptive and in the experimental sections many statements, discussions and stories that stimulate reflections on the state and development of science then and now.

The book starts with two prefaces, by Burkhard Thiesmeier and Wolfgang Böhme, and an introduction by Sergius Kuzmin. Then Laurenti's treatise is presented, the facsimile on the right hand pages, with the English translation on the opposite pages, followed by the illustrations. Finally, the translator provides a few comments, a list of books of the authors mentioned by Laurenti, a list of valid scientific names for species mentioned by Laurenti, and references for main sources of information.

Sergius Kuzmin has undertaken the difficult task of translating the text from one foreign language into another. One can find flaws and minor mistakes in the translation if one looks for them, but by and large Kuzmin has succeeded remarkably well in providing a readable and correct English version of Laurenti's work. The treatment of geographic terms, both Latin and German ones, is slightly inconsistent as sometimes a modern spelling is given (e.g. "Wieden" for "Widen", "Dauphine" for "Delphinatu") whereas in other cases an outdated spelling is directly taken into the English text (e.g. "Nusdorff" or "Smolandia"). The location "In alpe Etscher" or "In Etschero monte" (type locality for *Triturus alpestris*) is repeatedly rendered as "Escher mountain" though the name of this mountain is Otscher (ROČEK et al., 2003, gave the incorrect spelling Otscher).

The publisher is to be commended for making available this important classical work to a wider audience.

LITERATURE CITED

- ADLER, K., 1989. – Herpetologists of the past. In: K. ADLER (ed.), *Contributions to the history of herpetology*, Saint Louis, Society for the Study of Amphibians and Reptiles: 5-141.
- ROČEK, Z., JOLY, P. & GROSSENBACHER, K., 2003. – *Triturus alpestris* (Laurenti, 1768). Bergmolch. In: K. GROSSENBACHER & B. THIESMEIER (ed.), *Handbuch der Reptilien und Amphibien Europas, Schwanzlurche IIA*, Wiebelsheim, AULA-Verlag: 607-656.
- TIEDEMANN, F., 2001. – Chronik der herpetofaunistischen Erforschung Österreichs. In: A. CABELA, H. GRILLITSCH & F. TIEDEMANN, *Atlas zur Verbreitung und Ökologie der Amphibien und Reptilien in Österreich*, Wien, Umweltbundesamt: 13-42.

Corresponding editor: Annemarie OHLER.